

**Improving Fire Department Response Time in UC
Council President Scott Peters, First District
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For more than 30 years, University City has been served by a single fire station, responsible for all fire and emergency calls in North and South UC. While the men and women of Fire Station 35 are to be commended for their fine work, we need to improve fire and rescue service in UC. It is a priority for me to reduce the amount of time it takes for fire crews to respond to calls in our community.

In 2006, the City lost its bid for national fire accreditation due to significant gaps in response times. While most fire crews in San Diego arrive at a call in 5 minutes or less, the national standard, there are inconsistencies across the City. Fire Station 35 serves 14 acres, whereas the national average is nine acres in rural areas and four acres in densely populated neighborhoods. Calls for service jumped more than 50% since 1994, limiting the ability to respond to additional emergency calls. When crews from other areas must be called in to assist our firefighters, it reduces service in those areas as well.

UCSD also contributes to the emergency response situation in University City, generating over 500 incidents per year. This is a 31% increase in call volume since 1994, with additional calls projected in the future due to planned growth on campus.

One way to improve fire response is to reduce surface street delays and improve access to all areas of the community. After a long community process and a great deal of deliberation, the Mayor and City Council this year decided to proceed with construction of the Regents Road bridge. This will give fire crews quicker and easier access to streets on both sides of the canyon and reduce delays on other thoroughfares such as Genesee Drive. That's why our current and former Fire Chiefs strongly endorsed the Regents Road project. However, the chiefs also stressed that additional fire stations are required to fully serve all neighborhoods in University City.

Last year, in response to community input, I worked with the Planning Department to amend the University Community Plan to add language stressing the need for additional fire stations in several areas of the community. The City Council approved that change last November.

The City will consider a number of sites in both North and South UC to determine if they best address the needs of the Fire Department and the surrounding community. In the North, we're looking at the corner of Judicial and Nobel Drive. Another possibility is to reach an agreement with UCSD to build a station on campus land to serve the university as well as its neighboring community.

In the South, I would love to replace one of the gas stations at the corner of Genesee and Governor with a fire station. Unfortunately, the City does not have enough money available to purchase that land at this time. We are considering use of a limited amount of land currently owned by the City.

As you might expect, funding is an issue when it comes to building new fire stations. The land alone can cost several million dollars, with construction and staffing costs adding millions more to the cost. In the North, fees generated by residential and commercial development can be tapped for public safety facilities. No such mechanism exists in South UC, which means that any proposed station would compete with projects in other areas of the city for money from the general fund. Funding for a South UC fire station should be included in the City's next fire and life safety bond, scheduled for later this year.

We must ensure the safety of our communities by addressing the salary needs of our police and fire departments, in addition to improving and constructing new and existing facilities. I am encouraged by Mayor Sanders' promise to boost police pay this year, and I will work with the mayor and our police officers union to reach an agreement that is fair to our public safety employees and their families, and responsible to taxpayers.